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DE RUEHGB #1250/01 1140113

ZNY CCCCC ZZH

P 230113Z APR 08

FM AMEMBASSY BAGHDAD

TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 6972

INFO RUCNRAQ/IRAQ COLLECTIVE PRIORITY

RHMFISS/HQ USCENTCOM MACDILL AFB FL PRIORITY

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 03 BAGHDAD 001250

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E.O. 12958: DECL: 04/08/2018

TAGS: MASS MCAP MOPS PGOV PINS PREL PTER IZ

SUBJECT: RUN-UP TO ANBAR PIC - WHO'S IN CHARGE?

Classified By: Political Military Minister Counselor Marcie B. Ries. Reasons 1.4 (b) & (d).

¶11. (C) SUMMARY: In an occasionally animated three-hour meeting between representatives of Coalition Forces, the GOI and the leadership of Anbar province April 7, the senior provincial leadership pushed back against what it believed to be central government efforts to take provincial security authorities out of the hands of the governor and the police chief, and into the hands of the Iraqi Army (IA). Citing the loss of life incurred by Anbaris who fought back against al-Qaida insurgencies, the provincial leadership, including the Provincial Council and the tribes, underscored that they had earned the right to protect themselves. GOI representatives from the National Security Advisor's office, as well as Deputy Joint Forces Chief Nassir Abadi, and MNF-I Deputy Chief of Staff for Strategy, Plans, and Assessment, MG Robeson, sought to allay these concerns, at the same time, reminding them that the province had yet to train the requisite number of policemen required to carry out necessary security responsibilities. The police also did not yet receive the equipment needed to do the job. The Baghdad delegation underscored to provincial leaders their crucial role in the protection of their citizens and sought to persuade them this would not change with the establishment of an Operations Command in Anbar following provincial Iraqi control (PIC). END SUMMARY.

¶12. (C) Deputy PolMil Counselor accompanied to Ramadi April 7 MNF-I Deputy Chief of Staff for Strategy, Plans, and Assessment, MG Robeson, who sought to facilitate acceptance by the Provincial leadership in Anbar that the Operations Command, which would report to the central government would be in charge of the security services in the province following the transfer of security responsibility from Coalition Forces (CF) to Iraqi control in June. Robeson also sought to underscore to the provincial leadership the need to equip and train the required number of Iraqi Police (IP) in the province to fulfill one of the basic criteria of Provincial Iraqi Control (PIC). On one side was Governor Maamoun, the provincial police chief, plus the clerical leadership, and the Provincial Council. On the other side was the GOI, represented by a delegation from the office of the National Security Advisor. United by their fear that the GOI sought to marginalize their role in protecting their own province, the provincial leadership laid out their opposition to provincial security responsibility falling under the purview of the Iraqi Army.

We've Earned the Right to Protect Ourselves

¶13. (C) Welcoming his guests from Baghdad, Governor Maamoun recounted the security situation in Anbar province, noting the wanton murders of citizens and infrastructure damage by al-Qaida (AQI). Lauding the religious leadership present at the meeting, Maamoun pointed out how AQI had presented itself as a Sunni group whose true identity emerged through their

violence. The people of the province had defeated those who sought to separate the tribes through religious and economic means. Maamoun went out of his way to praise the support of the Coalition Forces and the role that the IA had played in securing the province. Maamoun underscored however, the blood that the "sons of Anbar" had paid themselves to challenge AQI and secure the province. Governor Maamoun expressed his gratitude to MNF-I for their support in the struggle to secure the province. He paid special tribute to Anbar Awakening founder Sheikh Sattar Abu Risha, who was assassinated by AQI in Fall 2007.

¶4. (C) Echoing the governor's remarks, Sheikh Ahmed Abu Risha paid tribute to his late brother, as well as to CF for defeating the AQI "criminals." Sheikh Ahmed underscored that the province supported the IA and the IP, both charged with implementing the law. He contrasted the current security situation with the past, in which arms were abundant and went unchecked and AQI killed innocent civilians based on sectarianism or unfounded accusations of espionage. Sheikh Ahmed was careful to delineate the role of security entities in the provinces, stating the people of the province preferred the IP be present in the cities and the IA to remain outside of the cities. Sheikh Ahmed said that what they needed was to have the Department of Border Enforcement present in the province. The leadership had written to the GOI with the request but had not heard back.

¶5. (C) The chairman of the Anbar Muslim Association concurred with the previous statements of support to the GOI and to Iraqi law enforcement agencies. Underscoring his opposition to the IA in starker terms, the chairman stated that newly independent Iraq had flourished until 1958, which ushered in the era of military leadership, culminating in the

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Saddam Hussein regime. Speaking bluntly, the chairman said that any Iraqi government based on sectarianism or led by the military would fail. The recent events in Basrah were proof. He went on to recount how the people of the province rejected former military officers who sought the office of the governor after 2003. He also rejected an IA presence in the cities, citing the need for the IA and the IP to coordinate with the provincial leadership. Anbar had earned the security it enjoys today through the blood of its "sons." Security responsibility belongs in the hands of the governor. "In the name of the Ulema in Anbar," he concluded, "we are against the decision completely."

GOI Not Seeking to Usurp Provincial Perogatives

¶6. (C) Responding to the unanimous criticism by the provincial leadership, NSA representative Hamza confirmed that the Operations Command would be under the control of the military, but it was a temporary situation. The central government believes that a security threat still exists in Anbar, thus warranting the Operations Command. The governor, other provincial leaders and the Awakening will be represented in a committee. The Operations Command, he said, would not strip the province of its authority. Each provincial entity has a security task. Hamza pointed out that the IA drew from the ranks of Anbar natives. Hamza stressed that the PM is a civilian, not from the military, and Baghdad did not seek to interfere in the internal affairs of the province. Hamza stressed that the Operations Command as directed by the IA falls within the PM's purview and within the Constitution.

¶7. (C) Provincial Police Chief Tariq noted that security is improving in the province every day, adding that security gaps around the province that had been identified and remedied, such as the Lake Thar Thar area and Haditha to prevent AQI infiltration. The province was coordinating with the 7th IA division to close gaps. Opining on the Operations Command, Tariq said that a year ago, the concept would have

been a good idea. Today however, it was not necessary. The occasional VBIED aside, Anbar's security situation was better than in many other places in Iraq. Tariq reiterated to the gathering the sacrifices that provincial police have made to secure the province, including giving up their own lives to stop suicide bombers. Further citing their professionalism, Tariq said Anbar police were ready to travel to Basrah last week to help restore order to the city.

¶8. (C) Following the interventions, animated discussion broke out around the table as GOI representatives became engaged in legal sidebars with their provincial counterparts and the governor sought to engage Hamza on various points of his presentation.

¶9. (C) Addressing the group, MG Robeson pointed out to the leadership that Sheikh Ahmed, his late brother Sattar, and the Awakening had demonstrated across Iraq, adding that the ceremony that inaugurated the Awakening last year had set off "a tidal wave" across the country. The time has now come to move to the next constitutional stage and the next step forward. He asserted that the facts are clarified under the Constitution; the governor has responsibility for security of the province and allowed that, in comparison to previous times, the security situation is more normal than before. The province has 24,000 police, but only 12,000 have been trained. In addition, vehicles, weapons, and communications equipment have not been distributed to the IP. Hopefully in a year, all forces will be trained and equipped. In the meantime, the PM, using his constitutional prerogatives, has made available extra security forces to assist in maintaining security in the province. Robeson pointed out that the establishment of the Operations Command is constitutional, according to legal experts.

¶10. (C) On the draft Memorandum of Understanding meant to codify the security responsibilities, the roles should be defined by the governor, Provincial Council, and the IA commander, a process which is already occurring, as the IP are present in the cities, the IA operates outside of the cities. The Operations Center is meant only to ensure coordination between the the provincial police and the IA. In closing, Robeson underscored his confidence that the governor, Ulema, and the provincial sheikhs will find a constitutional way forward.

A Question of Interpretation

¶11. (C) Reviewing the legalities of the Operations Command, NSA Legal Advisor Dr. Bassam stressed that the Prime Minister's Directive #97 (establishment of the al-Anbar

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Operations Command) was indeed legal direction by the Prime Minister, a view shared by MNF-I. Governor Maamoun said that the province did not oppose the Operations Command, but its implementation. He argued that there are at present two battalions operating in the province, but it would be better to have them under the same leadership. Likewise, the role of the governor, tribes, and the Ulema should not be taken away. MG Robeson rejoined that Anbar has not yet trained and equipped the 24,000 provincial IP. The IA will have to assist in securing the province until the 24,000 IP are trained and equipped.

¶14. (C) At the conclusion of the meeting, it was agreed that the group would meet again in Ramadi after two weeks to conclude the discussion. (Note: This meeting has not yet occurred. End note)

Bridging the Gap

¶15. (C) COMMENT: Having lived through horrific violence perpetrated against its citizens by AQI, it was clear that

the Anbar leadership felt that it had earned the right to protect itself and resented what they considered to be the long arm of the central government meddling in their affairs.

It also was clear that the provincial leadership needed to hear that its prerogatives would not be swept aside. We expect, though, that it will take another such meeting for the governor and the Provincial Council to accept that the Operations Command will have ultimate authority. In the meantime, the provincial authorities and the MOI will need to work on training and equipping the police sufficiently to be ready for the current date for PIC, tentatively scheduled for June 1. END COMMENT.

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